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URBAN FRINGE BELTS AND SUBURBAN AREAS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Abstract: *The paper analyzes the developed approaches to the definition of a suburban area in the Russian urban planning theory and practice and the concept of urban fringe belts that was investigated in detail in the English-speaking world. Similarities and differences of these concepts, the internal structure of their land use and their role in urban development are emphasized.*

Keywords: *urban fringe belts, suburban areas, urban morphology, land use*

Introduction

Areas around the cities have always played a significant role throughout their history. The adaptation of city peripheries to various economic and domestic needs occurred at the early stages of the emergence of different cities. In each cultural context, distinctive concepts and definitions were used to designate the edge of cities and suburban areas. Generally, the developments of suburbs were unplanned with a lack of perspective view of the further city development. Subsequently, urban fabric “leapfrogged” these areas, which were characterized by distinctive road network, variety of land-use units and large areas of green spaces. Thus, peripheral territories were embedded in the city boundaries preserving their functional characteristics and structure. In the theory of urban morphology such areas are defined as an urban fringe belts, which are a specific part of the internal structure of the city.

At the present time, the concept of urban fringe belts has not been recognized in urban planning practice. Nevertheless, the existing suburban areas are in the focus of urban planning and design practice and continue to play a special role in the city life. A comprehensive land use plans of suburb areas are developed as part of strategic spatial planning and regional development, especially in Russian urban planning theory and practice.

Methodology

The study was conducted on the example of the Russian theory and practice of urban planning. The domestic planning standards and rules (1932, 1933, 1940, 1945, 1998, 2001) and theoretical works of researchers of the suburban areas of the 20th -21st centuries were studied.

The fundamental investigations of M.R.G Conzen, J.W.R Whitehand and M. Barke served as the basis for the study of the urban fringe belts.

Measurement and analysis

The development of new research approaches in order to improve and develop suburban areas was considered necessary in 1920s. It was found out that metropolises may influence their suburban areas in the aftermath of urbanization and enlargement of cities’ footprint. The matter of squatter and unstructured settlements in suburbs caused the necessity to find new planning concept, as these areas needed to be developed not only systematically but holistically as well. Thus, the development planning of the suburban areas was considered crucial in the city planning since the beginning of the 20th century. New city planning regulations appeared alongside, where the matter of suburban planning was important as well.

The first state law regarding urban planning was established by All-Russian Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) dated August 1st, 1932 "Concerning improvement of the RSFSR communities". Furthermore, that was the first official paper where the demand of suburban designing was considered. The definition of the suburban areas also was specified: protective green zones and rural areas around the community, which are meant to provide dwellers with food resources.

The site plan of Moscow, approved by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks on July 10th, 1935, was the first site plan that corresponded to all the regulations and statutes. The project provided for the development of the green belt around the city.

In the middle of the 20th century, during the postwar period, the concept of suburban area planning also underwent changes. The temporary guide was made by Committee for Architecture of the USSR Cabinet dated May 26th, 1945 "Concerning scope and content of project and planning works on reconstructing cities and city-like communities". The paper documented the change of the suburban area concept; earlier it was understood as a rural area that pertains to a certain part of the city. The temporary "Guide for planning projects and city building" was a part of the official paper established by the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR dated August 9th, 1945 "Concerning planning projects of cities and villages of the RSFSR" that was approved on May 21st, 1956 by the USSR State Committee for Construction. The inadequacy of the proposed regulations was revealed when applied. It turned out that having functional information about the area was not enough for suburbs' planning and regulation. The requirements for using the area were not taken into account while placing specified objects and dimensioning suburbs themselves.

The development of project standards for suburban areas took place in 1950s-1960s. The key message in the new concept was that suburban areas were places where the interests of the city and suburbs themselves interlaced. That was the reason to consider suburbs not as a rural area only. Thus, during that period there appeared a new definition of a suburban area, i.e. surrounding city area that is used for meeting multiple requirements of urban citizenry, and household.

The goal while planning suburban areas now was "to replace disorderly used suburban areas by systematic and interrelated ones in accordance with economic objectives and design ideas. Suburban planning involves placing basic constituents in the right order, their interrelation, and developing of communities" (Conzen, 2012). The adequate management of the suburbs was the key to their right functioning.

Therefore, the conceptualization of the suburban areas was based on the necessity to create essential comforts for living and to develop the given city.

The question of the method for determining the boundaries of suburban territory became quite problematic. Various indicators were proposed for determining the boundaries of the suburban zone: the size of the settlement zone for the suburban population employed at the enterprises of the main city; the time required for their commuting; the remoteness of mass recreation facilities for the urban population in the suburbs. As practice showed, these indicators were not stable. They could not be standardized and are individual for each locality.

According to the subsequently approved rules and norms for city planning and construction, the boundaries of the suburban area are established depending on the size of the city, local conditions, the development of transport links, the actual and anticipated placement of places for mass recreation. The proposal that the boundaries of the suburbs should coincide with the administrative boundaries of the districts became essential in addressing this issue for domestic practice. Consequently, the degree of distribution of a large city functional impact on the adjacent territory was not taken into account.

Greater attention was paid to defining internal boundaries of a suburban zone. Internal boundary meant the existing border of urban development (residential, industrial, warehouse) and

reserve areas intended for urban construction under the design plan. It included the territories on the border of urban and suburban development that were perceived as the most complex ones in organization and design. Special attention is paid to the direct contact belt-like zone between a city and a suburban area. This zone, according to research, is subject to particularly frequent and dramatic changes.

The idea of a conditional division of the city and the suburban area, which form a single whole – a new form of development of a major city, was one of the important conclusions in the process of development of the suburban area concept in the middle of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the suburban zone was not a stage in the development of the city and not a reserve for its growth, but “organically expedient and relatively stable state of the territory if proper planning is in order” (Khauke, 1960). There are few reasons to consider suburbs as a reserve area, which the city can occupy if it lacks space for development.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the lack of a concept for the development of suburban areas, the unorganized use of land to accommodate various functional areas, the expansion of the territory of suburban settlements have complicated its planning.

In 1998, the Town Planning Code of the Russian Federation was approved. Chapter 9 was devoted to the regulation of the use of the territories of suburban areas in the implementation of urban development and contained a number of important provisions. The establishment of the boundaries of suburban areas was carried out on the basis of town planning documentation in accordance with this Code and the land legislation of the Russian Federation.

The concept of “suburban area” was fixed in the Land Code of the Russian Federation, adopted in 2001, after the repeal of the City Planning Code.

According to the Chapter 86 of this document, “suburban areas ... may include land outside the boundaries of urban settlements, which make up a single social, natural and economic territory with the city and are not part of the land of other settlements” (The Land Code..., 2001). Suburban areas include the territory of agricultural production, recreation areas for the population and reserve land for the development of the city.

In 2015, Chapter 86 lost its relevance. Thus, the sphere of legislation has gone beyond the notion of a “suburban area”.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of a suburban zone stops circulating in theory and practice of urban planning. The territories adjoining a city are not regulated during the design stage and develop in accordance with their own laws. Since there is no interest in the concept of urban fringe belts in the domestic theory and practice of urban planning, it may adversely affect the further development of cities and lead to the emergence of concentric territories with specific types of land use in their structure.

The concept of urban fringe belts

The concept of urban fringe belts proves the stages and processes of forming the existing plan for former peripheral territories. The urban fringe belt is the territory formerly located on the edge of the city, but in the period of its development and increase in area it entered into its structure and retained its original characteristics (Khauke, 1951).

Urban fringe belt is characterized by peripheral land use: warehousing, production and transportation facilities, cemeteries, green spaces, educational institutions and health care institutions, as well as low-rise buildings.

A specific feature of the urban fringe belts is their chaotic and unplanned development, a complicated street-road network, a large number of open spaces and a low density of construction [4].

From the end of the 18th to the middle of the 20th century, in the process of urban growth, urban development “leapfrogged” urban fringe belts, which later clearly appears in the city plan for many centuries.

Conclusion

The results of the study and the revealed common features and differences between urban fringe belts and suburban areas and the example of the Russian theory and practice of urban planning are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Suburban areas	Urban fringe belts
an object of planning	arise spontaneously
has a number of independent functional land uses	a functional composition of land use depends on the needs of the city
the boundary is established in the planning process	the borders are unplanned
develop during economic boom	occur during economic slump
a suburban area and a fringe belt are specific territories that are not considered as reserve areas for city development	
unplanned parts of outer fringe belts are able to arise spontaneously in a suburban area, contrary to the plans for its development	

Theoretical studies and domestic practice of urban planning do not exclude the possibility of the existence of spontaneously developed, unplanned areas within a suburban zone that at the same time structure and separate city's development and natural environment in this transitional territory. The researchers emphasize the complexity and significance of the territory on the border between a city and its suburbs.

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